



# Always on call

February 12, 2019

On an otherwise quiet Saturday morning, the New Mexico State Police in Santa Fe receives a frantic call from a hiker. She tells the dispatcher that her friend has fallen down a ravine and is trapped below, possibly injured. The dispatcher calls Santa Fe's [Atalaya Search and Rescue](#), an all-volunteer organization.

Among the team responding to this incident is Lab employee Ben Yeaman. Together with other members of this specialized rescue team, he sets up a rope and pulley system so that he can descend into the ravine, bringing with him first-aid supplies and what is called a Stokes basket, a customized type of stretcher designed to immobilize a victim to ensure safety and comfort. It is up to the team above to carefully lower Yeaman down to the hiker. Yeaman loads the injured hiker into the basket, which is raised to safety.

"I had some friends who volunteered at Atalaya Search and Rescue," says Yeaman, who works in the Laboratory's Weapon Systems Engineering division. "They convinced me to attend a recruiting event, and it worked. I joined the team and have been there for about three years."

Ben says that there are several search and rescue teams stationed in Santa Fe, all of which are 100 percent volunteer and not for profit. Although skill sets of the teams overlap, the Atalaya team specializes in technical rope rescue.

## An emphasis on training

"My team is on call 24/7," says Yeaman. "We operate under the State Police and the New Mexico Department of Public Safety."

The Atalaya team has collectively participated in hundreds of search and rescue missions in all types of environments, from mountains to forests to deserts. "We get missions all the time," Yeaman says.

"Most are lost hikers or other such types of rescue. These types of rescues don't always require our specialized rope rescue training, but we also train for search techniques, so we are able to respond to most missions. When we do get a call that requires our skills in rope operation, I am thankful for all my training, as I will rely on it during such a rescue."

"Dedicating time to training and being available are the most difficult things when it comes to keeping members on these teams," he notes. "If you show up and dedicate the time, we will find a place for you in search and rescue. All the other skills can be taught and refined with experience—it's maintaining consistency in training and participating in rescue operations that makes for a seasoned rescuer."

> [Learn more about Yeamans' work with Atalaya Search and Rescue](#)

**Los Alamos National Laboratory**

**[www.lanl.gov](http://www.lanl.gov)**

**(505) 667-7000**

**Los Alamos, NM**

Managed by Triad National Security, LLC for the U.S Department of Energy's NNSA

